

## **Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen (Part One)**

### **Church History**

**Martin G. Collins**

**Given 08-Dec-18; Sermon #1464**

One of the many deceptive things being done today to bring about a demonic One World Government is the erasure of the history of nations, especially the systematic deletion of each country's past.

We see it almost daily here in the U.S. in many ways. One visible method is the tearing down of statues and monuments like we have seen in the news. The same thing is happening in Europe. Unlimited immigration backed by the United Nations is helping to accelerate it.

Destructive, liberal progressive propaganda is energizing the pop culture today with mean-spirited disregard for our nation's history and heritage. Statues commemorating founding fathers are being toppled, torn down, and pulverized!

Here are some recent headlines:

### **Columbus Monument Smashed in Baltimore**

A 225-year-old statue of Christopher Columbus, the famous explorer who opened the New World to colonization, was smashed by an individual wielding a sledgehammer in Baltimore, Maryland.

### **Atlanta Peace Monument Attacked**

A mob in Atlanta attacked and damaged a monument constructed in 1911. The Peace Monument depicts a Confederate soldier laying down his arms.

### **Abraham Lincoln Bust Vandalized in Chicago, Twice**

A giant bust of Lincoln that had been sitting in a Chicago neighborhood for 100 years was burned and badly damaged.

The leftist Southern Poverty Law Center said that in early June, 110 monuments have been removed. Thousands more await demolition. And, there are dozens of other vicious attacks on statues, buildings, and names in the West.

Western civilization loosely based on a Judeo-Christian ethic is being targeted everywhere we turn. Mainstream news, academia, sports, and entertainment are saturated with perverted misrepresentations of marriage, family, and morality.

George Orwell said, "The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history." This is the modus operandi—the MO, the mode of operation—of the Democrats, the European Union, and the United Nations, also known as the “Deep State,” the “Elite Left,” and the “Globalists.”

In the former USSR, censorship, rewriting of history, and eliminating undesirable people became part of the Soviets' effort to ensure that "the correct" ideology and political spin was put on their history. Deviation from official propaganda was punished by confinement in labor camps, and execution.

Today there are efforts to rewrite the history of the U.S., albeit the punishment is not so draconian as that of the Soviet Union. These history rewriters have enjoyed substantial success in getting Christian icons removed from state capitol grounds and other public places. Rewriting American history is challenging, but this does not discourage leftists from their emotional uproars.

The hate-America types use every tool at their disposal to achieve their agenda of discrediting and demeaning our national history.

### **Our Church Heritage**

Our cultural heritage is the physical manifestation of our history and forms an important part of our identity. Deliberate heritage destruction, which attempts to remove all traces of the past, is often used as a tool of ethnic and sectarian extinction.

As I watch the destructive nature of what is happening to this nation and other Israelitish nations, and as citizens forget their country's history and heritage, it deeply struck me that very few members of God's church ever look back at and appreciate our Christian heritage; not the mainstream "Christian" heritage of this nation, but of the true church of God's heritage.

The true history of the church of God must *not* be forgotten. We must not allow ourselves to forget as the ancient Israelites continually forgot theirs even though God warned them not to.

**Deuteronomy 8:11-20** "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end; then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God.

Although this warning not to forget is first and foremost about the worship of God and keeping the letter and spirit of the law, notice that it is also a warning not to forget their history and heritage:

“Who brought you out of the land of Egypt,” “Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness,” “Who fed you in the wilderness with manna.” This is all historical. This is part of our heritage.

Satan’s minions have been relentlessly trying to destroy the history and heritage of God’s church since Jesus Christ established it and the apostles spread it. Of course, God has allowed it to some extent to hide His church from view for its own protection, and that those He calls will recognize the truth being distinctly different than the world, and that, “He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end,” just as He did with ancient Israel.

God’s church has a rich history of failures and successes, of tribulation and peace, of persecution and justice. And, you and I share in that heritage. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, made our commission clear as far back as in the Old Testament.

One chosen generation must convey the knowledge of the Lord’s works to the next by declaring and praising God—by hymns and psalms recording and celebrating God’s greatness. Successive elected generations must continue to offer devotion and praise, and it must be continually transmitted to the end of time.

**Psalm 145:1-4 (ESV)** I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

That is our history, and our heritage, as well as God’s spiritual truth. David is thinking here of the greatness of God displayed in His mighty works. If you can look at the surge of the ocean, the glory of the mountains, or the splendor of the sky on a cloudless night and not be moved to praise God, you are more to be pitied than a person who has lost his or her physical sight.

Yet wonderful as God’s works of creation are, a person who has come to know God’s goodness in Jesus Christ can hardly stop there. The greatest of God’s works are His salvation works.

In the case of the children of Israel, these were always understood to involve God’s power in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt and bringing them into their own land. For us, above all else, God’s salvation works are His work of saving us from sin through Christ’s atonement.

Both goodness and righteousness were preserved and displayed in the death of Jesus. In Jesus’ death God showed Himself to be both good and righteous in saving sinners. In this stanza, in verse 4, David also says that “one generation shall commend your [the Lord’s] works to another.” This statement does not mean merely that the stories of God’s past acts will be passed on by the redeemed community, though that is true, but that each generation of believers will add to that heritage the account of what God also has done with them and us.

It is part of our church history in this past one hundred years under Herbert W. Armstrong, and the Worldwide Church of God, and then on through the different groups which came out of it. This is all part of our history and heritage. It should bring us together.

God continues to act for us and in us. Our recognition of this truth and our confession of it are part of the praise we offer God.

**Matthew 16:18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

And so there is a history all the way down almost 2000 years to today. It is important that we not forget our heritage—our family history, and especially important is the history of God’s church.

Writer and philosopher George Santayana is credited with this revealing statement in its original form, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." So, we also have this to consider, that if we do not remember the past errors of the church, are we inclined to repeat it, tending to make the same mistakes? We have a lot we can learn from the history of the church that has passed under the bridge in the last 2000 years or so.

And because people forget, and adversaries re-write history, the world has been left with a false history of Christianity. Satan counterfeits everything God does; he has done the same with God’s church, even hijacking the name of God’s people—followers of Christ—Christians, as well as our history. We are the true Christians.

The Catholics (with their pedophile priests and Mary worship) are not true Christians. Their spiritual daughters—the Protestants (with their traditions of men, new age beliefs and homosexual ministers)—are not true Christians.

The history of God’s church is entirely different from what most people believe. It is totally different from the history of this world’s “Christian” churches.

The one true church of God began with Jesus Christ, and the apostles He specially chose and trained to carry on the work He began. Through all ages since, in every generation, God’s church has continued as a small flock, all the way down through history to today.

Even the Worldwide Church of God with its 140,000 members was a small flock compared to Hindus (which number almost a billion), or the Muslims (which are in the multiple millions), and the professing Christians (which number in the multiple millions also). We have always been small as a church group, even at our peak membership.

Jesus said, “For many are called, but few chosen.” Is the church’s heritage yours also? Or, are you just passing by, even like the thousands that have passed by in the past 100 years?

This saying, “For many are called, but few chosen” appears in only two verses, Matthew 20:16 and Matthew 22:14. Both times it is said as a concluding remark of a principle to a parable. The first parable deals with God calling people to His work, while the second parable with God calling people to the Wedding Supper.

Look at the terms “called” and “chosen.” In the Greek, they are related. “Called” is kletos, meaning invited, appointed, summoned. It is used in general, but on occasion the apostles used the term to refer to one who has been called to an office, as called to be an apostle.

“Chosen,” in the Greek, is eklektos, meaning called out, picked out, selected; by implication favorite or choice. “Eklektos” is usually more specific in its usage. Sometimes it is translated “elect,” meaning one who is specifically picked out to the exclusion of others. This describes members of God’s church.

To illustrate the difference in their basic sense, let us say you went to a store, and chose all your shirts to fill your closet. You like them all, but *one* is your favorite. All your shirts are “called,” but that favorite shirt is “chosen.” This is a very basic example, but it illustrates the point.

We can see this illustrated in The Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22. The king first sent his servants out to gather those who were invited, and they were not willing. Then, he sent out other servants to others of them in, but they gave excuses, and some killed the servants who were out to invite everyone they saw. They brought in good and bad until the hall was filled.

So far, all we have described here are people being “called.”

Then, the king comes in and he immediately begins evaluating the group. He sees one who does not have on a wedding garment and rejects him. This is the negative part of “chosen.”

At this point, what can we conclude? Calling is far more general. Protestants think it is as simple as hearing the gospel preached, but John 6:44 says that God prepares a person’s mind to hear the truth. The qualifications for being called are simple. God will call bad and good, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, or man and woman.

Once called, however, the choosing begins; it is nothing more than what Peter says in I Peter 4:17, “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” This is where things narrow down to the few.

Few are willing to endure it, to make the effort to overcome, grow, and produce fruit. Even many who attend Sabbath services with God’s people may prove to be without the wedding garment and show at last that they were not the chosen of God, although they had been called. We know that there are wheat and tares in the church.

God is not limited to working with any political entity or group that is formed by people. Salvation is given on an individual basis to those whose faith is accompanied by works. Faith without works is a dead faith—a useless faith. Salvation cannot be earned; it is a gift from God. Nevertheless, God expects submission to His authority and fruit produced as a result of our using His Holy Spirit.

We have a huge part to play in the choosing. We must put on the wedding garment (i.e., righteousness) and the new converted man. This can only be done with the empowerment of God’s Spirit. We have to yield to being molded into the image of God, growing in character, in grace and in knowledge.

This choosing is a joint effort—we work and the Father works! Our duty is to show Him our faithfulness, commitment, and obedience.

God calls many and He selects only a few. He makes His truth available generally, but by comparison, only a few succeed in passing through the “strait gate” and the “narrow way.”

So, hundreds of thousands of people throughout the almost 2000 years of the true church’s history have been introduced to God’s truth and gone back to the religions of this world. But only a few thousand have overcome and stayed faithful to the end of their lives.

A prime example of how easy it is for human beings to go back to what they came out of, is what we saw happen to many of our friends and acquaintances who seemed to know the truth, but went back

to Sunday keeping, Christmas, and Easter. We found it near impossible to believe, but it was just a continuation of what has happened to thousands of people who were called and did not make their call and election sure.

There are certain trends in human nature that God's people tend to fall into that show up more dramatically as a group—as a whole body—as the church. If one individual is sinning it does not necessarily show up in an obvious way in the church, though it could. But when many are committing the same sin, then the sin is very obvious in the church body and, if left uncorrected, is eventually devastating to the human organization through which God is working.

Laurence J. Peter, author of, *The Peter Principle*, insightfully states, “History teaches us the mistakes we are going to make.”

So, we can look back at the church's history, and their examples of failures and successes, and learn what errors we might make individually, and/or as a church.

And some of those we can pull out of the “Letters to the Seven Churches,” that are found in Revelation 2 and 3, which Richard Ritenbaugh is going through in his sermon series. It is amazing that Richard and I both came up with our subjects independently not knowing what the other would be speaking on, but we found that while talking with each other last week, our sermons are going to be dove-tailing together. It is fascinating how God works things together. I will be dealing more with the history side of the picture, while he will deal more with spiritual principles, so you will get a complete package.

It is wise then, if we look at the history of God's church to see what mistakes we will want to avoid.

Several questions naturally arise when addressing the characteristics of the true church of God through history.

1. What errors have been apparent through out the history of the church?
2. Why does it seem that the church was unable to overcome them?
3. What are the tendencies that have caused many attendees of the church of God throughout its history to go into apostasy?
4. Does the history of the church of God repeat itself?

So, let us take a trek through church history. Let me begin by making this qualifying statement: In my research, I have used many different reference works, both theological and secular, in addition to God's written Word, the Bible. As much as possible, I have referenced historical works, but I have also tried to not disrupt the flow of this commentary on church history any more than is necessary.

I do not consider this sermon and those sermons that follow regarding church history to be my original work, but rather, a presentation of the long hours of labor by others who researched the obscure records necessary to put together a reasonably accurate church history tradition for our edification and admonition as members of the true church of God. This church history series is full of essential spiritual principles as well as warnings of spiritual pitfalls and persecutions which plagued the church.

Large gaps often appear in the historical records. Information is sometimes very sketchy, at other times erroneous. The true followers of Jesus Christ were very often victimized. During some periods of history, what we know about them comes only from their adversaries. So, sometimes the line of history is fine and sometimes uncertain.

Nevertheless, there is a reasonably clear line of continuance. The premise from which I am going to present this history is that Jesus Christ Himself clearly prophesied in Matthew 16.

**Matthew 16:18** “. . . I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave, or death] shall not prevail against it.”

That church, foretold by Jesus, would never be extinguished. Christ’s church is to last through all ages! He also said in Luke 12:

**Luke 12:32** “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

It is a small and very often persecuted church, as described in Revelation 12, but a church that would always exist somewhere on earth.

Religious history looks at the wrong church. Satan’s carefully planned illusion of history deceives the whole world. For almost 2000 years the world has focused in the wrong place for the church Jesus built.

A huge chasm lies between the apostolic church Jesus founded and the earliest beginnings of today’s mainstream Christian churches. Nearly all the writings of the period after AD 70 have been destroyed, either on purpose or by decay. Bible prophecy, and ironically, the slandering enemies of the true church help us to identify it in history.

Some of the church’s characteristics are prophesied in the book of Revelation. Lessons about the spiritual state (or attitude) of the church down through history are revealed. Seven times, Christ warned in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

God’s church is a spiritual body and is composed of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells; those who obey and teach God’s commands.

**Revelation 14:12** Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

So, all the way down through history we can be assured that the true church of God, the one that Christ established, follows these general, basic, essential guidelines. Secular history shows that God’s church did not grow large and become a powerful organization, exerting powerful influence on the world. It did, through the Spirit, influence the world greatly, but in a totally different way than the world’s churches have.

Is it any surprise that the visible organization calling itself “Christian” and ruling over the nations during the Middle Ages was not God’s church but Satan’s counterfeit? So then, Satan certainly has tried to overshadow and destroy the true church of God since its establishment. The true church continued as a tiny “little flock” almost unnoticed by the world, almost unknown to later historians.

You know well the basic background, establishment, and commission of the church. Jesus actively taught for a comparatively short time, only 3-1/2 years. During that time, perhaps many thousands heard him, but only a few really believed what He said. From among those few, Jesus trained twelve men to be apostles of His church.

On the day of the Passover in AD 31, Jesus was crucified. It appeared for a moment the movement was over, even to the twelve disciples. But three days after His death, the most momentous event in history took place. Jesus was raised from the dead—to Spirit, self-contained life.

For 40 days, He appeared to His apostles and to many of His disciples. They were thoroughly convinced He who had been dead was now alive.

He left them with these final instructions:

**Matthew 28:19-20** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and [by means] of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

That final clause shows that it was not only to the disciples that this commission was given, because He said “always, even to the end of the age.” Ahead lay the work of the church to teach others God’s way of life and to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

### **The Establishment of the Church**

Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem and He promised He would send them help. Ten days later [counting from the Ascension], on the Day of Pentecost in AD 31, the New Testament church of God was established. The help Jesus promised was the Holy Spirit—the spiritual power sent from God to inspire those God called into His church.

The true church is the collective body of individuals, called out from the ways of this present, evil world, who have totally surrendered themselves to the rule of God, and who, through the Holy Spirit, have become the begotten sons of God, who Jesus has purchased by shedding His own blood for them.

In Acts 20, the apostle Paul says:

**Acts 20:28** Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The true church is not some politically organized denomination that we join or become a member of only in order to be saved. Jesus did not die for some religious organization called a church. Joining a



local church congregation does not put us into God's church. We cannot join God's church. Only God can put us into it by His Spirit. God makes us members of His church if we surrender our lives to Him, even if we have no local church with which to fellowship.

The church is called the Body of Christ because it is a spiritual organism whose living, active head is Jesus Christ, in the same sense that the husband is head of his wife in a Christian marriage.

How do we enter the true church of God, that is, this spiritual union?

**Acts 2:36-39** "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

The church of God is not a lot of divided, quarreling denominations, but one church, composed of many scattered members; one church united in Spirit, mind, attitude, and heart because its members have totally surrendered their wills to God, and have yielded to correction and admonition from the Word of God.

By going through this history of the church, I hope to bring us all closer together.

Jesus promised in John 16:13 that He would send the Spirit of truth that will guide us into all truth. Here is the key that proves which individuals are in God's church. It is composed only of those who are growing into truth as God reveals it by His Spirit through His written Word. The moment anyone ceases to grow but wants to retain only what he had 5 or 10 years ago, from that moment on the Holy Spirit in a sense dwindles and eventually ceases to live in him.

It is the few, not the many, who understand the truth.

**I Corinthians 1:26-29** For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

We are the weak of the world. By the world's perspective, we are the scum of the world. This is who God is going to use to glorify Himself, and to stun the world.

The world cannot receive the truth because they have not been called. The apostle John said in John 1:

**John 1:5** And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Meaning, God's Word goes out to the world, and they cannot possibly understand it. Christ is the light, and we reflect Him; we are the light of the world because of Him, not because of us. That is why we are persecuted, because they first persecuted Christ.

Jesus explained why in John 3:

**John 3:19-21** “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

But the world does not believe that its deeds are evil, because the whole world has been deceived without realizing it! They want to be lulled to sleep by false teachers who teach what people want to hear.

### **Apostasy (AD 31- 135)**

Scarcely 20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostle Paul, in one of his first inspired letters, cautioned Christians not to be deceived by false preaching, or by false letters purporting to be from the apostles.

Paul warned:

**II Thessalonians 2:3** Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

The wholesale departure of Christians from the truth was the first event prophesied to befall the true church.

In Acts 20, Paul, the teacher of the Gentiles, explained how the apostasy would begin. He gathered the ministers of the church at Ephesus to deliver them a final message concerning their responsibility over the local congregations.

**Acts 20:29-32** For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

That description so closely resembles what happened in the Worldwide Church of God. And that is what I think of deceitful, despicable ministers who were false ministers, savage wolves, speaking perverse things.

The Ephesian ministers were specially assembled because, immediately after Paul left Ephesus, there came within the local church congregations, false ministers who made a prey of Christians. They were as wolves in sheep's clothing. And, even from those elders already in the church congregations, some perverted the doctrine of Jesus to secure a following of Christians for themselves. Even before all the apostles were gone, as you well know, the Scriptures show that they were fighting constantly to guard the truth, and remain faithful.

Paul instructed the minister Timothy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all patient endurance and the teaching of Christ.

**II Timothy 4:3-4** For the time will come when they [tares in the church] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

I cannot believe how many people I still hear of who are listening to dozens of ministers. They seem to be seeking whoever is the most entertaining. They are listening to a vast number of them, and they are barking up the wrong tree. Not only Paul, but also Peter warned the churches that many would allow themselves to be misled. And, just as he cautioned, false teachers came in among the true Christians bringing in heresies.

**II Peter 2:2** And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

Also, Jude, the apostle and brother of Jesus, had to include in his letter the stern admonition that every Christian should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. He warned that there were certain men who had crept in and the brethren were unaware of them. These self-seeking men were ungodly men who turn the grace of God into a license to sin, and deny God the Father and Jesus Christ. These are sensually oriented people, who cause divisions and do not have the Spirit to guide them in decent behavior.

There was one minister in the Worldwide Church of God who was using the youth group to run drugs across the Mexican border. And there were worse things than this. There were also homosexual ministers, at least two I knew of. So, they were already sneaking in before we all began to leave.

These deceivers are deceived themselves, and are typical of the constant manifestation of false Christians down through the ages. They turn the unmerited pardon of God into a license to disobey the commandments, saying such things as, "You do not have to keep the commandments, but you should want to because of the love of God in your heart." This is a typically deceitful statement. The first half is a lie and the second half, the truth. But half-lie and half-truth still equals a lie.

Jude says these teachers first separate their followers from the body of the church. Then they form their own churches of a false Christ. But they were no longer real Christians, if they ever were. The apostle John saw the same apostasy develop.

Many in the world believe the countless false teachers. The few listened to and believed the apostles of Christ. The worldly oriented members and those with their own agenda did not believe the true apostles, but rather, accepted the false teachers who rose up in the church.

[Such as those who taught that you do not have to eat unleavened bread every day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Or, those who said you do not have to keep the Sabbath by not seeking your own pleasure on it.]

**I John 2:18-19** Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is

the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

This is why there are so many denominations and splinter groups today. The phrase in verse 18, “by which we know that it is the last hour,” has an ongoing sense, in that, the natural result of an increase of traitors (false teachers and leaders) in any organization is the destruction of that organization.

Now, I am not saying, here, that the other major church of God groups like Living Church of God, United Church of God, and Church of God, a Worldwide Association, and others who came out of Worldwide Church of God are false churches. Not at all! I believe God has raised them up to do a work. Each one has its own work to do. But God's saints—the members of God's church—are spread throughout these groups. Now, just because you are a member of a physical organization does not mean you are truly a chosen member of God's church, because God's church is spiritual. And, that translates across many different organizations. God is the only one who can judge who are wheat and tares. I just want to make it clear that I am not blasting the other church of God groups at all. We are all in it together. We all have the same or similar problems.

### **Putting True Christians Out**

The disintegration of a dishonest organization is mostly spiritual. The organization grows for a time, but a negative transformation takes place in the character of the organization, forcing the honest ones out, like the Worldwide Church of God did. Whenever false ministers were able to influence the majority in a local church congregation, they began to expel the faithful ones. This desire to force out the true Christians happens consistently throughout history, beginning in the first century Christian church.

The apostle John saw this, and wrote about it in his letter to Gaius, in III John.

**III John 9-10** I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

The true Christians, who alone comprised the true church, were being put out of the visible, organized congregations. They were the scattered ones of whom John mentions in I John 3:1, where he said, “Therefore the world does not know us.” But that did not mean the scattered individuals were not part of the church. They were the true church of God because they were joined to Christ through the Holy Spirit. Those who drove them out became the false Roman Catholic Church—the church of the god of this world.

But Jesus promised to be with the faithful remnant, His church, to the end of the age; to continually guide His people to the Truth.

### **Declining Zeal**

There were two 19-year cycles in the history of the apostolic church during which the gospel was carried to the old world. It was 19 years from AD 31, when the church was founded, to the time Paul

went into Europe, about the time of Pentecost in the late spring of AD 50. From AD 50 it was another 19 years until the fleeing of the headquarters church at Jerusalem in AD 69.

In the first 38 years, as congregations and conversions multiplied, the distant churches had frequently appealed to the authority of the mother church in Jerusalem. But then, a period of declining zeal set in for the whole church.

The excuse was that Jesus had not returned at the height of the crisis over Jerusalem in AD 66 to AD 70 as many expected. The reason was that in their waning zeal they failed to remain close to God in prayer, Bible study, and fasting.

**Hebrews 12:3-6** For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Meanwhile, in the Greek world to which the apostle Paul was sent in the East, Antioch became a secondary headquarters. It was equally accessible from Jerusalem and Syria, as well as from the Greek-speaking area in western Asia Minor. Paul, Barnabas, and other leaders continued to work in Asia Minor from Antioch.

The churches that God raised up through Paul in Asia Minor were later under the general supervision of the apostle Peter. Even long after apostolic days Antioch remained a primary center of the church.

The first century Roman-Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, in his *Wars of the Jews, Book VI, Chapter V, Section 3*, recorded a very unusual occurrence that happened in AD 69 on the Feast of Pentecost.

Moreover, at the feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple. . . they said that in the first place they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a multitude, saying, 'Let us remove hence!'

God's people heeded the warning and did remove hence. In AD 69, the Christians in Jerusalem fled northeast, to the town of Pella, beyond the River Jordan. From that time forward the united power of the church of God to spread the gospel of the Kingdom of God ceased from Jerusalem. Christians throughout Judea were scattered because of the Jewish wars.

### **Removal of Ephesus**

Paul's later headquarters, in the West, when he went to Europe was Ephesus. Ephesus was so important a city on the Aegean Sea that it naturally served as a later church headquarters.

While the church in the East was being held together through Pella and Antioch, the church of God in the West (that is, in Rome), with most of its leaders martyred, became the prey of false teachers. As soon as Peter was martyred, probably around AD 80, events moved to a climax.

There was no James, or Peter, or Paul. John alone was in charge. Apostasy was developing rapidly, especially in the West. Many people who listened to false teachers began to look for new leaders and new headquarters.

Sadly, they did not look to Jesus Christ, the head of the church. The new leaders systematically “clarified doctrine” with human reasoning and Greek logic. As one doctrine was changed by these false leaders, another had to be altered so it would not conflict with the other new false doctrines. All the doctrine of Christ is so interlocking and interdependent that it is virtually one doctrine.

Immaturity in the truths of Christian doctrine makes the church like gullible children tossed helplessly by the waves and wind of cunning and deceitful schemes of false teachers.

**Ephesians 4:14-16** That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

That takes a close-knit group. We must become closer in one body, and get rid of our differences, and our hurts, and those types of things.

The truth must not be used as a club to bludgeon people into acceptance and obedience, but must always be presented in love. The truth leads the Christian to maturity, which is defined here as growing up into Christ. As head, Christ leads, directs, and guides the church body.

About AD 90, Roman Emperor Domitian began the second imperial persecution. And, John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, where he received the [book of] the Revelation of Jesus Christ and the command to write it down. He was eventually released.

John, at close to 100 years of age, the last survivor of the original 12 apostles, and Philip, (of Acts 6: 5) who had originally been a deacon, both died in Ephesus, according to Greek tradition.

In His revelation to John, Jesus Christ commended the Ephesian church’s attitude of hard work, patience, and goodness in how they lived God’s way of life. He also had something against this church’s attitude because they had left their first spiritual love.

As a result of this attitude of lost first love, Christ threatened to remove Christians with this attitude out of their place!

An early church example of this was done physically, in type, even before the prophecy was written, when the Jerusalem headquarters church was transferred to Pella in AD 69.

It was done spiritually when the authority and respect in which this mother church had been held, was stripped from it in AD 135 after the second major Jewish war with Rome.

In AD 135, most of the Pella congregation apostatized. They elected a Gentile leader named Marcus, who disfellowshipped those few clinging to the truth. These apostatizers returned to Jerusalem and joined the synagogue of Satan.

Christ carried through with His discipline, not just in the first century church, but down through the ages as well. This was part of the reason the WCG was splintered by Him. The false church that remained never repented of leaving its first love for the truth of God.

At the time John penned the words in Revelation 2 and 3, around AD 96, Jesus Christ already knew the performance record of the church at Ephesus. The Ephesian church congregation was chosen by Christ, the Head of the church, as a type of the entire church in apostolic times.

Jesus did not use the Jerusalem church for this purpose because John's headquarters was not at Jerusalem or Pella, but Ephesus. It never repented of leaving its first love for the truth of God. So, the warning that John recorded in Revelation 2 about the spiritual weaknesses and strengths of God's church applies to its entire history until the return of Christ.

**Revelation 2:1-5** "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 'I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.'"

Ephesus had lost its early love for Christ. But that is not all. In doing so, Ephesian believers had lost love for one another and needed to revive the compassionate works they did at first.

Love for Christ and love for one another are related. The first century church had to fight tooth and nail to guard the truth and stay unified.

### **The Church in Smyrna**

Next, leadership shifted to Smyrna. It is significant that after his release John trained Polycarp, an elder of Smyrna, a city near Ephesus in the province of Asia. Polycarp lived from about AD 69-155 and his name means 'much fruit' in the Greek.

The brethren of the church at Smyrna appeared physically poverty-stricken. Yet, it was spiritually rich and alive, though suffering through persecution. This was the setting and character of God's church during the next three centuries under the persecuting power of the Mystery Babylon dominated Roman Empire.

At Smyrna, Polycarp presided over the church of God for half a century after John's death. He stood up boldly for the truth while many fell away. Many of them began associating with the conspiratorial bishops of Rome.

Among the Gentiles, the churches in Asia remained the most faithful to the Word of God. Polycarp was fiercely persecuted because he kept and taught the true Passover instead of Easter.

According to the Catholic historian, Eusebius (who lived in the time of Constantine), in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chap. 24, in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1 wrote:

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by the apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church of Smyrna . . . He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus,” bishop of Rome around AD 154, “caused many to turn away from the . . . heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles . . . While at Rome, Polycarp discussed with the Roman bishop the matter of the introduction of the pagan Easter in place of the Passover.

For neither could Anicetus (the bishop of Rome) persuade Polycarp not to observe it” [i. e., the Passover] “because he had always observed it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the apostles with whom he associated; and neither did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, who said that he was bound to follow the customs of the presbyters before him.

Bishop Anicetus had no scriptural grounds for Easter observance. He determined to follow the customs of men. He followed the traditions of the false ministers before him.

In about AD 154, when Polycarp was about 85 years old, he traveled to Rome over the matter of the Passover. His mission was not successful. The bishop of Rome, Anicetus, observed communion on Sunday and refused to be persuaded against it.

In AD 156, Polycarp was burned to death by a mob in Smyrna. Within 36 years of the time Polycarp confronted the bishop of Rome over Passover and other changes, Rome had already established its counterfeit version of Christianity.

Polycarp and Polycrates (who lived from AD 130-196), were elders at Smyrna in the second century, and are the last leaders of the church in this part of the world, of which there is any record. The younger Polycrates, Polycarp’s disciple and fellow minister, became the leader of the true believers.

The confrontation turned heated between Polycrates of the true church in Asia Minor and Victor of the Bishop of Rome. Victor claimed the authority of excommunication and began an attempt to cut off whole churches of God who observed the true Passover. This was around AD 190-198.

A very revealing letter is preserved in *Volume 8 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, pages 773-774.

Here is part of the forthright answer given in the letter by Polycrates to the Vicar of Rome:

As for us, then, we scrupulously observe the exact day, neither adding nor taking away. For in Asia great luminaries have gone to their rest, who shall rise again in the day of the coming of the Lord. . . I speak of Philip, one of the twelve apostles. . . John, moreover, who reclined on the Lord’s bosom. . . Then there is Polycarp. . . These all kept the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month, in accordance with the Gospel, without ever deviating from it, but keeping to the rule of faith.

We see the influence of this argument regarding Easter still alive in the KJV of the Bible in Acts 12, where “Passover” in the original Greek is translated Easter [in our English Bibles].



**Acts 12:4 (KJV)** And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions [squads] of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

Most modern versions such as the NKJV, ESV, NIV, and most other versions, correctly translate it as "Passover."

So here, we are in the later part of the second century. How do we know that the 27 New Testament books included in most Bibles are truly authorized as part of the canon, the authoritative collection of inspired Scripture?

The Catholic Church did not authorize the biblical canon; it only accepted it, but not officially until AD 405. Then, who authorized it?

The Bible has its own internal authorization protocols that the Catholic Church merely followed, and subsequently, most others also accepted. It is evident from the agreement of the 5,000 extant, ancient copies of the New Testament that the canon was already set before the Catholic Church approved it.

The most obscure internal authorization protocol may be the prophecy in Isaiah 8:16: "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples." The early church understood this to mean that the canon would be "bound," that is, finished and authorized, by the time the original twelve apostles had died.

The apostle John was the last of the original Twelve to die (around AD 100), and it is supposed that he gathered the present 27 New Testament books together and authorized their use in God's church.

One protocol for authenticity is that the authorship of a book must be apostolic (or written under the supervision of an apostle). Peter had already begun some of this canonization as early as the mid-AD 60s. He included his two epistles. II Peter 3:15-16 suggests that Paul's epistles had already attained the status of Scripture by that time. Luke was Paul's longtime assistant and it is assumed that Luke's Gospel and Acts were written under Paul's supervision.

The Gospel of Mark is assumed to have been included under Peter's direction. Later, John would include his gospel, Revelation, and three epistles, making a total of 24 books. There are no legitimate, canonical problems with Matthew's Gospel, James, and Jude because all three were written by apostles.

Probably the most important protocol for canonicity is "internal unity," sometimes called conformity to the "rule of faith." It is obvious that the New Testament books agree on doctrine, Christian living, history, and prophecy. They are unified with each other; they are a whole in 27 parts. (Now I just summarized what we have on our website.)

Officially, by AD 140, the church recognized all 14 of Paul's letters plus all four gospels. The first historical list of all 27 New Testament books dates to AD 367. The Catholic Church did not officially ratify them (by papal decree) until AD 405.

Let us wrap this up for today. Edward Gibbon, author of *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, appropriately said, regarding the Roman system of Mystery Babylon:

History is indeed little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.

This is true of the fruitlessness of the lives of those who rebel against our awesome Creator. But, for those of us who submit to the authority of God the Father and Jesus Christ, by reverencing and genuinely accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior, He promises wonderful, eternal rewards.

We must remember and appreciate our rich true Christian heritage because it strengthens our commitment to God and to our brothers and sisters in Christ; it helps unify us.

The promises to the Ephesian and Smyrna churches in Revelation 2 are not only for them, but are for all true Christians:

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

And,

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”